

JustServe Members address gender-specific bullying at McClure Middle School

On February 3rd, 2005 AmeriCorps Members Isaac Brandt and Steve Carver, who serve at McClure Middle School, recruited the community-based nonprofit Passages Northwest along with high school and adult volunteers to provide gender-specific assemblies on the issue of bullying. The goal of the project was to promote a culture change at the school.

Recognizing that bullying often takes different forms among girls versus boys, the Members designed an assembly for all 6th and 7th grade girls in the school cafeteria, while boys met separately in the classrooms.

Teachers brought all of the 6th and 7th grade girls in the school to the cafeteria, where a speaker from Passages Northwest (a women's empowerment organization) outlined expectations and content for the assembly. Girls were seated according to a seating chart, developed carefully with input from school staff. A local theatre troupe made up of students from nearby Ballard High School acted out common forms of bullying between adolescent girls--- including nonphysical acts that are intended to isolate girls from their friends, which can be devastating to an adolescent's sense of well being and self esteem. After each skit, adult facilitators (women volunteers from the community and female JustServe Members from other sites) facilitated small group discussions at each table, asking girls about the prevalence of these acts of aggression in their lives, giving them a chance to express their feelings about bullying among girls, and discussing strategies to interrupt and end bullying within their school and their lives. At the end of the assembly, the girls made posters in their own handwriting about how to respond to girl bullying.



JustServe Member Steve Carver, standing in front of the Anti-Bullying bulletin board at McClure Middle School. The little strips of white paper all over the bulletin board are advice about how to respond to and end bullying, that students at the school came up with themselves.

Meanwhile, boys met in smaller groups in classrooms, where male facilitators (including JustServe AmeriCorps Members and McClure staff) engaged them in discussion about the particular pressures on boys, what forms of bullying take place between boys, and what kind of men they look up to and want to be. The boys watched Lets Get Real (a video which links with the Olweus anti-bullying curriculum), shared personal stories of violence, and created posters with 5 actions that a student can take to prevent bullying from happening in their lives and in their school.

After the assemblies, the AmeriCorps Members transformed the posters that the students created into a permanent anti-bullying bulletin board display in the main school hallway.

"We are all well aware of how serious bullying is," explains McClure House Administrator Mark Roschy. "It causes low self esteem, depression, eating disorders, drug and alcohol issues, law breaking, and forms of retaliation that feed the cycle. And in some cases, it can have deadly effects. At McClure, we have a vision to grow a culture of respect, and create students who do not remain bystanders but actively promote anti-bullying strategies. As a result of the work by Ike and Steve, our attempts are working. We are starting to hear kids in our hallways use the phrase 'We don't do that here' to new students who try to bully their classmates."